

The Utilization of Social Media Platforms for viability of Female-owned Small and Medium-scale Enterprises in South Eastern Nigeria

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Abstract: Social Media platforms can be employed by businesses to create value, and innovatively create newer products and services for the marketplace. With limited resources during the start-up phase and growth expansion later in the business cycle, gender constructs which impede performance, can be circumvented with the use of social media platforms. This paper examines the use of social media as a strategic/viability tool in business venturing in relationship to challenges facing female entrepreneurs in developing systems such as Nigeria. A survey approach was utilized for analysis of the data collated from 73 respondents. A semi-structured questionnaire was the research instrument, and analyses were made with Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS vs. 25) for a set of descriptive and inferential statistics. Results indicate that some aspects of gender stereotyping could be mitigated by using social media. The constraints of inability at balancing work-life interface, impact of limited mobility, impact of family responsibilities and relationships could be circumvented, leading to enhancement in business operations. This increases viability and sustainability of these enterprises long-term.

Keywords: Social Media platforms; small- and medium scale enterprises; sustainability; developing economy; women entrepreneurship development

JEL Classification: M20; M14; M10

1. Introduction and Background

Entrepreneurship globally has become the sole driver for employment and industrial growth in advanced and developing economies, women entrepreneurship becoming a new and more recent phenomenon in most economies. Entrepreneurs are quick to identify gaps in the market place, then resort to factors of production to innovatively and creatively exploit those gaps by producing products/goods and services to cater to the needs of the customers. Apart from societal benefits from entrepreneurship, governments generate higher revenues, together with increased earnings for those under employment. This translates into higher standards of living (Oke, 2013). More

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so financial stress on women entrepreneurs and their families is drastically reduced or ameliorated.

Globally, female enterprise venturing has been increasing exponentially in number (ADB, 2014; UNCTAD, 2014; World Bank, n. d.; MIWE, 2018), unfortunately in developed systems women are pulled into entrepreneurship by the need to fill a gap; while in developing systems, they are pushed out of necessity ((World Bank Group, 2012; Vossenberg, 2013; Mushtaq, 2012). In the absence of any meaningful employment from the formal sector, self-employment becomes a viable option open to most women (World Bank, 2012; Vossenberg, 2013). However, women entrepreneurship faces a number of challenges [time, human and social capital, physical constraints] that impede growth, sustainability and sound business performance in comparison to their male counterparts. Gender bias and stereotyping (USAID KSC, 2010; Beneria, 2001), means that women more than men are discriminated against in their environments of business operation, therefore they aggregate to the informal sector where experience and entry requirements may not be relevant in running a business. Apart from this, the returns on investment (ROI) are generally lower (Beneria, 20012). They therefore, end up using rudimentary machinery for business venturing. This impacts negatively on business performance, for on the whole they are not able to produce under economies of scale, cannot interact with potential markets far and wide, have very little exposure to appropriate customer base, and face more limitations on technology use for accessing information related to compliance, market pricing, lawyers, accountants, as well as accessing potential investors (Oke, 2013; UNCTAD, 2014).

Additionally, World Bank-World Development Report (2012) of 19 countries, show social norms, physical mobility and public safety concerns featuring highly among challenges confronting female entrepreneurs in developing systems. Gender equality matters according to the World Bank Report (2012) for “it is smart economics.” It propels economic efficiency and development outcomes by removing hurdles that prevent women from accessing same quality education, employment opportunities, and inputs for productive lives as men. The mandate of United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) is acceleration of inclusive and sustainable industrial development (ISID), in developing/transitioning economies by taking “steps for poverty reduction, enhancing economic growth, and sustainable development” (UNIDO, 2017). The empowerment of women as half of global population means growth to national GDPs. Limited empowerment of women act as impediments to lasting prosperity. Globally the number of female-owned businesses is accelerating (MIWE, 2018), unfortunately they manage small growth businesses than men, run businesses in less profitable sectors and have a higher propensity to failure than men (UNIDO, 2017).

Prior research into women entrepreneurship in Nigeria, contend that certain constraints such as: limited access to finance, gender bias and stereotyping, absence of meaningful wage employment, absence of career advancement and facilities for skills and management development, inability at balancing life-work interface, inadequate family support, cultural norms, and traditional role of women in society, limit the entrepreneurial productivity of women (Hezekiah et al., 2007; Kehinde et al., 2016; Akpan, 2015; Ekenyong, 2015).. However, (Etim, 2019; Etim & Iwu, 2019), opine that lower business performance is attributable to certain constraints – economic, social, institutional, administrative and legal factors which limit women’s entrepreneurial abilities. The MasterCard Index of Women Entrepreneurship Report (MIWE, 2018), also states that women entrepreneurs “are driven by grit and determination” solely by the need to provide for their families, while (Campos & Gassier, 2017; Vossenbergh, 2013; Mushtaq, 2012), maintain the position that female entrepreneurs face higher risks, several constraints, and obstacles in comparison to their male counterparts. This dampens their creativity leading to the observed underperformance.

In light of the above, this study seeks to establish if business operations can be enhanced by leveraging on Social Media (SM). This paper is structured as follows, literature review, the methodological processes in data collection and analyses, the discussions of the findings, and study conclusion.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Successful Female Entrepreneurs

The socio-economic status of developing countries can be improved through emphasis on entrepreneurship development (Galbraith, 2007). More so, economic development is multidimensional: not rigidly dependent on accepted economic model of input factors, but on other indicators notably culture, gender, business type, market and operational environment (Galbraith, 2007). Entrepreneurship can be viewed as a decision-making process requiring careful market analysis, tempered by the environment (government’s policies) which may affect the viability of the enterprise (Cunha, 2007). Key entrepreneurial skills or attributes include motivation for engaging in business formation, innovative and managerial skills, educational qualification and networking potential are necessary for entrepreneurial success. The proper motivation including – financial benefits, achievement and knowledge acquisition were suggested by (Mitchell, 2004), together with necessity for growth and advancement in social status in their respective communities are important for women in self-employment to be successful (Porter, 2005). Additionally, (Reavley & Lituchy, 2008) opine that attributes such as entrepreneurial skills, financial and

strategic planning, and networking for market and customer information were important for the viability and survival of women-owned small scale enterprises.

Accordingly, (Jill et al., 2007) are of the consensus that physical capital, social network interconnectedness and training are important for entrepreneurial success. Equally, (Tara et al., 2008) posit that performance for female-owned MSMEs is dependent on social capital, motivation and the ability to be actively engaged in collaborative exchange, which is gender sensitive. Such social networks include trade unions, umbrella organizations, and cooperative societies, together with micro-lending programmes where poor women in developing economies can turn to for credit. Important to women in the service industry, was the need to improve their marketing skills and initiatives to be in a position to react immediately to customer demands and directives.

2.2. Social Media and Entrepreneurs

There is a new phenomenon - Social Media or Web 2.0 (Kadam & Ayurekar, 2014) that is affecting the way entrepreneurs behave in the market place. As of today, the number of social media platforms includes social networks, private social networks, blogs, and micro-blogs (Shabbi et al., 2016). The most popular networking facility sites include: Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Viber, WordPress, YouTube, Flickr, Google+, Pinterest, Quora, and Snapchat (Bajaj, 2017; Mehra, 2017; Maina, 2018). These platforms enable entrepreneurs and businesses to gain better access to a wider target audience; be in-tuned with their varying wants and needs, innovatively collapsing time and space between production and delivery of products and services, together with greater engagement between potential customers and their businesses (Smith & Taylor, 2004; Jagonga & Kinyua, 2013).

Social media can provide “marketing that is more effective, new communication and distribution channels, shorter time to market, customized products, 24-hour online technical support, and online interactive community” (Mukoolwe & Korir, 2016). The buying attitudes of customers have shifted in recent times from the traditional “brick and mortar” to digital platforms, and customers are choosing the convenience, assertiveness and control that digital buying provides (Perju, 2015; Tosifyan & Tosifyan, 2017). Critically, entrepreneurs consider social networking platform useful tools for opportunity recognition in any business environment (Park, 2017). There are two propositions in terms of “entrepreneurial opportunity recognition”, sourcing for new information available in the market place to identify the opportunity (Schempeter, 1934), or using available information in the market to enable the entrepreneur discover the opportunity (Kirzner, 1997).].

2.3. Significance of Social Media to the Growth of Women Entrepreneurship

Female entrepreneurs represent a group of women with the potential to initiate and create businesses (Manerkar, 2015). This takes into consideration the creation, planning and control of operations. On the other hand, (Okafor et al., 2010) contend that “women entrepreneurs are simply women who participate in total entrepreneurial activities, taking the risks involved by combining resources together in a unique way so as to take advantage of the opportunity identified in the immediate environment through the production of goods and services.” In the same vein (Adebayo, 2015), views female entrepreneurs “as a group of women with ability for identifying disequilibrium in the market place, generating the necessary inputs of production, and incorporating a business.” Enterprises with more than 51 percent capitalization, 51 percent employable positions allocated to women and managed by a woman or group of women can be characterized as female-owned Micro-, Small-scale, Medium-scale Enterprises (MSMEs) (Vijayakumar & Jayachitra, 2013).

Recent studies have focused on the implications of social media on entrepreneurship (Oke, 2013; Morah & Omojola, 2018; Benwell, 2014; Digital Marketing Skills Institute, n. d.) development in Nigeria. Social media platforms through the internet have positively and drastically improved the immediate connectivity with new markets, supply chain, and customers with greater benefits for businesses [Kaplan et al., 2010]. Interestingly, for start-up and small enterprises, social media enhances relationships with stakeholders (Indrupati & Henari, 2012), thereby increasing competitiveness in a cost effective way (Ali, 2011). Connectivity is facilitated cost-effectively even for those that are non- skilled and with limited funding (Ajjan et al., 2014). In the study (Constantinidis, 2011) focusing on adaptation of a theoretical model on the use of social media by women entrepreneurs in developing economies, found that empowerment and women’s self-efficacy is improved due to increased social capital. The power of technology according to (Genc & Oksuz, 2015) for female entrepreneurs enabled the maintenance of a better work-life relationship. Using Facebook as one of social media tools, they could balance networking and family life, as well as receiving support from other female entrepreneurs (Genc & Oksuz, 2015).

Additional benefits include:

- a) Women can quickly recognize entrepreneurial opportunity by selling directly to customers online;
- b) Low level of technological literacy required, which reduces cost;
- c) Gender constructs are minimized, and they can react efficiently to production and services delivery.

Despite the above advantages, (Cesaroni et al., 2017) utilizing qualitative studies on the relevance of social media to business operations by female entrepreneurs in Turkey, observed negative impact on businesses through the use of social media as

a tool for daily operations. The negative impact included: repetitive nature of work, imitation, non-satisfaction with their professional development, inability to achieve the required target audience, and competitive pressures which were unfair. Also Genc and Oksuz (2015) discovered potential disadvantages from the use of SM by Turkish female entrepreneurs. These included inability at identifying target audience, unfair competition, imitation of products, and decrease in market share as potential disadvantages. Advantages such as the disclosure of information at a cheaper rate, instantaneous messaging, and wider networking outreach, ability at keeping up with the latest trend, and enhance portfolio presentation were outlined. However, according to (DeFranzo, 2011), looking at implications of social media on female entrepreneurship in emerging countries, noted that studies in countries such as Indonesia, Kenya, Nigeria, Egypt and South Africa, indicated the opening up of new business opportunities. Equally (Oke, 2013) reported that for women in small enterprises in Ado-Ekiti, (South Western Nigeria), there existed a causal relationship between business growth and use of social media.

3. Methodology

This research utilized a quantitative method for data generation. Quantitative research enables the quantification of the problems through the use of numerical data or data which can be transformed into useful statistics. Attitudes, behaviors, opinions and a host of other defined variables can be generalized from a host of larger sample population (Gay et al., 2009). The reason for choosing the quantitative method was the philosophical approach (positivism), which acknowledges the existence of the world as “real” amenable to observation and quantification. By the collection and analysis of numerical data, the study is able to describe, predict, explain, and control variables of interest (SAGA, 2016). The literature review always provides the background information for the study as well as the adopted methodologies, research instrument, target population and analytical techniques for the study (Maree, 2007). Descriptive research, correlational, survey studies, observational research all are multiple aspects of quantitative research (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Using the quantitative design, data was collected from 73 female entrepreneurs in Uyo, (South Eastern Nigeria). The collated data was finally analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (vs. 25). A set of frequencies, valid percent (as descriptive statistics) and ANOVA, regression for (inferential statistics) are presented below.

3.1. Sample

A total of 400 female entrepreneurs (participants), where purposively chosen as the target population for the study in absence of a database of female-owned SMEs in the State. These female entrepreneurs were selected from subsectors covering

fashion/clothing stores, bookstores/stationary, food and confectionary, agriculture /agro-based products, hair care/cosmetics, trading, handicraft, and educational sector. They had to be Nigerians, over 18 years of age and must have been in business for a minimum time-frame of 2 years. However due to constraints of time, resources and for manageability, a sample of respondents was selected from the population. The survey method necessitates descriptive characteristics of the population. Hence, for improving the odds of guaranteeing a perfect representation of the population, probability sampling techniques was adopted. This is important from the standpoint that the survey method is attempting to describe a population utilizing a subset of the group (Maree, 2007). Additionally, the survey research allows for establishing relationship between variables (MacMillan, 2012), through correlational statistics.

The sample size was calculated to be 80 using the Taro Yamane Method (2016) as shown in Eq. 1 and 2.

$$n = \frac{N}{[1+N(e^2)]} \quad (\text{Eq. 1})$$

Where n = sample size, N = population under study; e = margin of error (could be 0.1; 0.05, or 0.01)

Thus:

$$n = \frac{400}{[1+400(0.1^2)]} \quad (\text{Eq. 2})$$

$n = 80$ (sample size required to maintain a 95% confidence level, 5% error margin and at a response rate of 50%).

A total of 150 questionnaires were administered to the respondent (Drop off/Pick Up) method. The number of questionnaires returned was 73. Others were discarded for either late arrival or improper completion.

3.2. Research Instrument—Questionnaire

A semi-structured questionnaire (based on demographics as Section A, and other questions covering social media utilization –Section B) were administered to the respondents. Ethical considerations of non-coercion or acting under duress, maintenance of anonymity and confidentiality, and publication of information pertinent to the research were taken into consideration. Peer reviews provided validity test before administration. Section A covered demographics --- age group, educational qualifications, marital status, business sub-sectors, and legal status of the enterprise. The information did assist the researcher establish suitability of the respondents to participate in the study as well as entrepreneurial propensity of the age groupings. Critical to this study, more questions on the use of ICT tools by

female-owned SMEs to counter gender stereotyping and constraints were included in Section B.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive statistics

The age range of the target group (respondents) varied from less than 25 years to over 65 years. 24.7 % were under 25 years, 23.3 % were between 25 to 34 years; and between 35 to 44 years. The rest were 20.5% (between 45 to 54 years) and 6.8% (between 55 to 64 years). It can be concluded that most of active female entrepreneurs fell between 25 and 54 years. This is within acceptable norms for most entrepreneurial founders. According to research by (Pierra et al., 2018) in Harvard Business Review, the average age of a successful start-up founder is 45 years. According to (Adeyemi, 2007):

“the Nigerian women entrepreneur is: aged 41, well-educated, married with children, grows up in an entrepreneurial environment, has previous work experience of about 8 years, runs a small business that has been operating for about nine years, and of which she is likely to be the sole or majority owner, prefers to have her family member as partner or employees, has her first attempt at starting a business, uses mostly her own savings as start-up capital; was motivated by personal factors when she decided to become an entrepreneur, faced start-up problems such as labor, financing and economic but today, faces increasing economic , labor and cost problems, rates her business as ‘moderately successful’ and attributes the success of her business to three qualities, that is quality of product/services, quality of human resources and her own personal qualities”

The educational status also showed 49.3% acquired middle level qualification, 31.5% were tertiary graduates; and 17.8% had post graduate degrees. Of relevant importance was 1.4% respondents had doctoral qualification. It is worth noting that education plays an important role in women empowerment in cognizance of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs-3). The need for empowering women through enhancing entrepreneurial activities, contributes significantly to economic development and prosperity of nations. Economic inclusion of women is directly related to building peaceful, stable and more prosperous societies (UNIDO, 2017). However, empowerment cannot be achieved without sound educational qualifications, and sound business acumen is a prerequisite for running successful enterprises.

Considering their marital status, (26 or 35.6%) indicated being single (non-marriage); (35 or 47.9%) were married; those divorced were (5 or 6.8%) and widowed (7 or 9.6%). Literature show that marital status contributes significantly to

the success of female entrepreneurs through emotional and financial support from their spouses. This narrative is confirmed here -- 48% of the women were married. The type of business operated by female entrepreneurs ranged from fashion/clothing store (20 or 27.4%); food and confectionary (8 or 11.0%); bookstore/stationary (7 or 9.6%); handicraft (9 or 12.3%); agricultural/agribusiness (7 or 9.6%); healthcare/cosmetics (12 or 16.4%); private schools (5 or 6.8%); and trading/wholesale (5 or 6.8%).

Considering the use of computers in businesses, (62 or 84.9%) of the respondents acknowledged yes while (11 or 15.1%) said no. In terms of digitalization of the business, (68 or 90.4%) acknowledged yes, and (7 or 9.6%) said no. Further questioning indicated that only (27 or 37.0%) operated only online stores; while (46 or 63.0%) operated both online and physical stores. This would suggest that the rigor of operating physical stores were demanding and possibly affected their inability at balancing work-life interface. Therefore, it was necessary to maintain both an online and physical presence. Equally it can be argued that maintaining both an online and a physical presence enabled these women increase their footprints, thereby increasing their customer base. The study did not try to ascertain the relative amount of time invested in running online as well as physical stores.

Looking at Tables 1 and 2, we find the results from digitalization of businesses.

Table 1. Use of ICT Tools Made Business Easier

Valid	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	68	93.2	93.2	93.2
No	5	6.8	6.8	100.0
Total	73	100.0	100.0	

Table 2. Use of ICT Made Family Responsibility Easier.

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	54	74.0	74.0	74.0
No	19	26.0	26.0	100.0
Total	73	100.0	100.0	

Taking a closer look at Table 1, we find that (93.2%) of the respondents indicated that business venturing were enhanced by the leveraging of ICT tools into daily business operation, while (6.8%) of the respondents were in the negative. This can be attributed to non-digitalization of the businesses. Table 2 also showed that by using ICT tools (as social media platforms), there was a reduction in the burden coming from family responsibilities. This enabled the women to be more productive in their business operation. Additionally, (26.0%) were not in the affirmative. Earlier

findings on marital status indicated that (35.6%) of the respondent were single, (6.8%) were divorced, and (9.6%) were widowed. Under these circumstances, family responsibilities were irrelevant or not very important to these group of women, hence the response rate of (26.0%).

4.2. Regression

Table 3. Regression Analysis

Model Summary^{b,c}

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.365 ^a	.133	.121	.366

a. Predictors: (Constant), Use of ICT tools made business easier;

b. Dependent Variable: Business connected to mobile device;

c. Weighted Least Squares Regression - Weighted by Number of computers in business.

The R value (.365) indicates a simple correlation between the dependent variable (Business connected to a mobile device) and independent variable (use of ICT tools made business easier). There is a low degree of correlation (.365).

R squared shows how much of the total variation in the dependent variable (business connected to mobile devices) can be explained by the independent variable (use of ICT tools made business easier). The Weighted Least Squares Regression can be obtained from weighting against the number of computers in the business—(13.3 %); inherently not too large. Thus the column with R^2 value represents total variation that the dependent variable (business connected to mobile device) could be explained by the independent variable (ICT use in business). In this study, 13.3%.

ANOVA results given below:

ANOVA^{a,b}

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.467	1	1.467	10.935	.001 ^c
	Residual	9.526	71	.134		
	Total	10.993	72			

a. Dependent Variable: Business connected to mobile device;

b. Weighted Least Squares Regression - Weighted by Number of computers in business;

c. Predictors: (Constant), Use of ICT tools made business easier.

The Regression Model has been able to predict the dependent variable significantly well. “Sig.” is given as .001 ($<<0.05$). The value of “Sig.” portrays the statistical significance of the regression model after the run. The results show convincingly that the statistics significantly predicts the outcome model (or relatively, it is a good fit for the data).

Coefficients^{a,b}

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.619	.144		4.294	.000
	Use of ICT tools made business easier	.441	.133	.365	3.307	.001

a. Dependent Variable: Business connected to mobile device;

b. Weighted Least Squares Regression - Weighted by Number of computers in business.

Using the coefficients results (above); the study predicted that businesses that were connected to mobile devices resulted in ease of operation for female entrepreneurs (Eq.3).

$$\text{Business operations} = 0.619 + 0.441 (\text{use of digital platforms-SM}) \quad (\text{Eq.3})$$

Here ease of business operation statistically contributed significantly to the predicted model ($p = .000$ (or $<<0.05$) or ($p = 0.001$ / or $<<0.05$).

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The objective of this study was the determination of the impact of leveraging ICT tool (as social media platforms) on business operations for female-owned SMEs in South Eastern Nigeria (SEN). Findings from a statistical analysis of the collated data with SPSS (vs. 25) showed that business venturing was impacted positively with the use of social media. Equally the burdens of family responsibilities and relationships (constraints to balancing work-life interface), were mitigated by used of ICT tools. The statistical results above ‘could be used to make a “generalization” that the constraints facing female-owned SMEs – (1) limited mobility, (2) limited skills in business operation and management, (3) inability at balancing family responsibilities; could be mitigated with utilization of social media platforms.’ Gender stereotyping, harassment at places of operations can be limited albeit minimally. Women do not have to be highly skilled in the use of technologies to be able to use social media platforms for business venturing.

5.1. Recommendation

Therefore, it is incumbent on governments and other stakeholders to pursue policies that enhance the competitiveness of the country by improving on the e-readiness rankings of Nigeria. Information technology infrastructure, human capital development, governmental regulations and policies, internet penetration are all critical components of e-readiness (Ojo, et al., 2007). The digitalization of enterprises, allow them to transact business electronically. Time and distances can be eliminated, enhancing faster product/service delivery, reduction in procurement costs, unlimited access to newer supply chain and customers. Impediments to digitalization of female-owned SMEs such as high cost of data, inadequate power supply, non-availability of internet hotspots, and inadequate human capital development (skills development and training) should be reduced drastically for the continued empowerment of those that are vulnerable in society (women, youths and disabled).

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